

HR

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<http://www.dop.wa.gov/eap>

■ I will be meeting with my employee to confront his tardiness. There have been five late days this month and it is unacceptable. I don't want to specify a "number" of days late as being too much because it will just encourage going to that limit. Are there any creative suggestions?

Every agency has its unique history in managing tardiness. Unfortunately, employees quickly adapt to leniency in this area. Even some of your best and hardest-working employees will come to work late if it appears there is no consequence. Check with your agency's policies and procedures as your first approach to this problem. Next, document the tardiness. An excellent documentation tool is the EAP Work Performance Calendar (www.dop.wa.gov/Managers/EmployeeAssistanceProgram/Publications.htm). You may want to try using a percentage rate in the discussion with your employee. For example, if there are 21 workdays in a specific month, and your employee is late 5 days, divide the workdays in the month into the number of late days. This will produce a "tardiness score" of 24%. Call this unacceptable. Require satisfactory attendance to be a tardiness score under 5%. Sometimes numbers like this make an impression on employees and they "get it."

■ I suspect one of my employees is experiencing spousal abuse at home. I have seen bruises, and this person often comes to work upset. Is this any of my business as a supervisor? How can I help without feeling like I am butting into the employee's personal life?

There are many observable behaviors, including those you described, that may suggest domestic abuse. From your description you have good reasons for telling your employee you are concerned and inquiring whether help is needed. Prior to talking with your employee, document observable behavior and signs of possible abuse. Consult with Human Resources to clarify workplace and legal considerations. Helpful resources may include the Governor's Executive Order 96-05 on Domestic Violence in the Workplace as well as your agency policies. The EAP is familiar with domestic violence in the workplace and can offer assistance, support and resources to you and your employee. Responsible authorities on the subject of domestic violence encourage involvement by others and caution against remaining silent in the face of obvious symptoms of abuse.

■ I called my employee "narcissistic" in a corrective letter because it describes the behavior others and I have witnessed. I think this word

Many health-related terms have found their way into everyday language. It is easy to forget that these words usually imply diagnostic labeling. They fail to describe specific behavior, and therefore, are inappropriate for documentation. Labels can undermine administrative or disciplinary actions. Words like *antisocial*, *neurotic*, *depressive* or, *narcissistic* may be familiar terms used in conversation, but they will interfere with your goal of correcting performance. They may also be seen as necessary

is descriptive and not diagnostic. Am I wrong? Will it cause problems in my documentation?

considerations under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Senior management is likely to reject your documentation if it includes this type of language, which may leave you frustrated. If your employee inflates his or her accomplishments, or fails to consider the needs of others, devalues others' contributions, or is often inappropriate and boastful, then say so. Support statements like these with examples. When you find yourself making a judgment about an employee's behavior, say to yourself, "By this I mean ____." This will reduce your tendency to use labels, and instead will enable you to use clear descriptive terms for what you have seen, heard, or witnessed.

■ **My employee holds a key public safety position. I received a report from his coworker that he is not cooperating with EAP recommendations. The EAP reported the employee made and kept an appointment based on my referral. Should I just ignore the co-worker's report?**

Your first consideration is the safety of others, so approach this issue from that standpoint. Investigate whether there is a safety concern and if your employee is adequately performing the functions of his job. Based on job performance behavior and after consultation with your supervisor or HR, take appropriate actions. You may consult with the EA professional to discuss whether a re-referral to the EAP is a good idea. It is not appropriate to ask about personal issues your employee may have previously discussed with the EAP. Your question is a good one because it requires some deliberation about how to respond to hearsay information. Some supervisors might presume hastily that such a report can be dismissed outright, but workplace issues, including safety concerns, require that it needs to be handled in a different way.

■ **Should I pay attention to my hunches and "gut feelings" that tell me my employee is using drugs on the job? There are no signs or symptoms, but he acts like he is proud that he is getting away with something. It's unsettling. Perhaps my dislike of him is my problem.**

It's not unusual to periodically have suspicions about employees you supervise. Nearly all supervisors experience hunches or concerns about the ulterior motives of employees from time to time. If consistent and ongoing, don't dismiss your concerns but discuss them confidentially with the EAP. Several outcomes could emerge from such a meeting, including gaining clarity on what is bothersome or valid about your concerns. You may even discover signs and symptoms you have overlooked that could be documented and acted upon later. You could also learn more about yourself, and how and why you respond to your employee in the way you do. The EAP will help you consider changes in your supervision style or perspective to improve this relationship.

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